DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 081 SO 016 935

AUTHOR Byrum, C. Stephen
TITLE The Hamstringing of Moral Education: Athletic Metaphors and Educational Administration.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Principles; *Administrator Characteristics; Athletics; Business; Comparative Analysis; Competition; *Educational Administration; *Individual Characteristics; Intellectual History; *Leadership Qualities; Moral Values; Social Behavior; Social Change; Social Environment

ABSTRACT

This discussion of "dominant metaphors" characterizing the nation's history focuses specifically on the period of metaphor change surrounding the ascent of the National Football League. The terms AGON and PAIDIA, used by the ancient Greeks to describe two dimensions of sports activities, provide the framework for a discussion of the athletic imagery that is too often used by educational administrators and the problem of too closely aligning educational methodology with business methodology. AGON, which requires a win-at-all costs approach to competition is seen as less desirable in the field of education than the PAIDIA approach which emphasizes the fun element, with winning being secondary in importance. When academic institutions and educational administrators are informed by AGON, the win-at-all-costs contest, education loses its independence and becomes little more than a tool securing the establishment whims of government and business. On the other hand, when education comes close to PAIDIA, it approaches moral education and infuses lives with character, and the more education moves away from PAIDIA, the more it claims that it really has no responsibility for morals and values. Organizational problems posed by mangement expert W. Edwards are then organized into two groups distinguishing between characteristics of AGON-oriented administrators and PAIDIA-oriented administrators. A similar breakdown between "conformist" managers, "conscientious" managers, and "post-conformist" mangers, as defined by Alon Gratch, is then provided to further illustrate this concept. (LH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED266081

THE HAMSTRINGING OF MORAL EDUCATION:

ATHLETIC METAPHORS AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

C. Stephen Byrum, PhD
Assistant Dean of Humanities
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Chattanooga State Community College
4501 Amnicola Highway
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37406

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Stephen Byrum

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP 016 935

1985

Human beings manage their lives with metaphors. We take that which is familiar to us and apply it to that which is unfamiliar. Processes that we have learned in the past, that make sense to us from our past, become the models by which we understand and explain new experiences. A plumber or heart surgeon may explain life in one way, while a traffic policeman or word processing computer programmer may depend on different models. An artist may build one metaphorical base, while an athlete may build yet another.

Nations seem to operate in terms of what might be called "dominant metaphors," and these are passed from one strata of national activity to another. Most dominant metaphors seem to first be established by government and are articulated by political leaders. They become the dominant mode of political rhetoric and are repeated daily in interviews, press conferences, political speeches, newspapers, and television. With the amount of political rhetoric that daily bombards the minds of the people of a nation, it is no wonder that the metaphors which come to command the attention of the political arena quickly influence a nation's overall mentality.

Dominant metaphors seem to be first passed from the

political level to the level of business, trade, and commerce. This would seem to be an obvious and natural passage because of the intricate alignment which exists between these two sectors of public life.

Finally, the dominant metaphors are passed from the business strata to the educational level. It seems, at least recently, that education has developed a near-infatuation with business. This is partly because education does serve the needs of business, but it is also because education has become increasingly dependent on business for economic support. Educational administrators, in what is often pursued like a courtship, have been increasingly thrown in with business executives, and seem to be intrigued and enamored by their wealth (in comparison to most educators) and power. Many educators have responded by attempting to model their personal lives and "management styles" after the preceived faster track lives of the business environment. I recently, for example, heard a high-level educational administrator announce that he now wanted to be referred to as a "Chief Executive Officer." In such an environment, it is only natural that dominant metaphors of government and business be appropriated by education.

It is also possible for dominant metaphors to change. Up until about 1960, the dominant metaphor in the United States seemed to come from the military-industial complex. This may be traced to the massive industrial and military build-up that occured in relationship to World War II and carried over to the industrial boom years of the post-war era. Many business

managers and educational administrators learned their skills and honed their techniques out of the context of this experience. The strategic and tactical metaphors which articulated and explained the processes used in this period definitely arose in this war context; and, who could question it, afterall, it had been amazingly successful.

However, in the early 1960s, there was a distinct metaphor change ("paradigm change" to recall the well-known philosophical work of Thomas Kuhn) which occured in the United States. A number of factors precipitated the change. First, management circles in all sectors were beginning to be infiltrated by new blood which knew little of the military-industrial strategy of World War II; many of the rising managers had had little or no military contact. Second, and especially as there was movement into the middle-1960s and Vietnam became more and more the center of attention, political-military-industrial strategies and management approaches became increasingly suspect.

At this same time, a series of presidents came on the scene who were caught up, in one way or another, with athletics. Eisenhower had played football at West Point and was photographed regularly on golf courses. The Kennedys became synonymous with clan touch football games. Nixon was the consummate fan and brought the tradition, carried on in later administrations, of phone calls to locker rooms of World Series and Superbowl winners. Ford had had a rather substantial football career, though some suggested without a helmet, and Carter was a jogger. This whole political engagement with athletics reached an

indicative epitomy with Reagan having played "The Gipper" in the Knute Rockne/Notre Dame movie that became one of the best-known Hollywood productions of its time. At times in recent years, the true hero in Washington has not been on Capitol Hill or in the White House, but the latest star of the Washington Redskins.

The proverbial "icing on the cake" for this period of metaphor change was the ascendancy of the National Football League. Basketball may have been the only major sport to actually originate in the United States, and baseball may have carried the title of being "the National pasttime," but during the 1960s professional football took over in no uncertain terms. Television and massive bonuses helped gain attention, and players like Joe Namath added glamour, but the guiding philosophy was one of driving power, intricate stategy, self-abandoning teamwork, and the win-at-all-costs proclamations of a dynamic coach named Vince Lombardi.

Lombardi's teams crushed their oppositon with television capturing each grueling moment. His Green Bay Packers won an unprecedented three straight national championships and the first Superbowl. Significantly enough, before his death, Lombardi brought his "management style" to Washington to lead the Redskins and, in doing so, brought more excitement to the nation's capitol than had been there in decades.

Government had a new metaphor -- football! Strategies, tactics, objectives -- the entire management process -- was now explained, understood, and modeled on a new metaphor -- football! Quickly, the metaphor spread from government to business (and,

one might also add, to the pulpit), and finally it has spread to the management of education.

I recently heard a college president present a seminar to middle-level college administrators; it is interesting how so many school administrators have worked their way up from some kind of coaching/athletic background. In the seminar, he stressed how in order to manage a college that a person had to know about football -- in principle, the processes of one were the same as the other. He went on to explain that women are disadvantaged in school administration because they traditionally understand very little about football. He devoted, then, the majority of the seminar to explaining, position by position, the ins and outs of football to the women in the room. With an aire of chauvinism that I am not sure he even recognized, he stated: "all the ('real' -- he did not actually say this, but it seemed to be implied in his voice and the expression on his face) men already know this, but it will not hurt them to hear it again!"

Metaphors are going to occur as long as human beings understand and explain; they are an unavoidable inevitability of life. Sometimes they may help, and at other times they may be harmless and even humorous. However, when the athletic metaphor as it is now being expounded becomes the dominant metaphor for educational administration, there is a deep-seated and essential conflict that is being established, and it is a conflict that puts the deepest educational traditions of Western civilization at odds with itself. The present athletic metaphor extended to educational administration runs the risk of doing much more

damage than any good that it might achieve.

To explain what I mean by this requires a radical shift in the temper to this discussion that calls for the embracing of a more scholastically philosophical set of ideas than the general sociological and historical phenomena that have been discussed to this point. This is not to say that the discussion will now be lost in philosophical complexity; what follows is basic, easily clear enough, and even interesting. However, the reader should be cautioned to move a little more deliberately into the remainder of the material being considered here.

The ancient Greeks, who established the ideal framework for Western civilization, had two words for sports. In providing these two words, they evidently sensed that there are two dimensions of sports activities or, at least, two ways of approaching and preceiving sports.

The first term which they used was AGON. AGON, which is typically translated "game," "contest," or -- significantly enough -- "battle," implied strict rules, high levels of organization, and whatever force or belligerence was needed to accomplish the only important end of the entire process -- winning. In fact, that which could be manipulated within the game, without regard for how it effected life in general, was seen as being permissable. Cheating, whether it be twelve men on the field or $150,000 to a college recruit, is alright, as long as you do not get caught; when you do, punishment is as much for being stupid enough to get caught as it is for the breeching of some rules or codes of ethics. Honor and integrity have little

to do with AGON -- or at least no more than the well-documented "honor among thieves."

The increased structure imposed by AGON was seen as a limitation on the human spirit by the Greeks. It produced tension and contained an in-built, high frustration factor. One need only survey the quantum leap in stress and anxiety that has accompained the so-called "progress" of the post-war era in the United States in order to make the Greeks seem almost prophetic in their assessment. Western philosophy has come to see AGON to be more reflective of the arrogant and belligerent Roman approach to life which creates dictators, self-styled gods, and little Hitlers; with the Roman approach, the Greek ideal is compromised and corrupted.

The Greek ideal for sports and games is manifested in a second term, PAIDIA. PAIDIA literally means "play," and play is seen as the essential quality in sports and games. It is what sports and games are defined by, the true goal of these activities, and to the extent that play is not accomplished and experienced in sports and games, they loose their meaning and legitimacy. Play embraces the fun element in sports, that which is fulfilling; to this, winning is secondary. The experience of the activitiy in-and-for-itself is the true goal. In this regard, having the opportunity to play, the dynamism of playing itself, the ability to loose ego as one is caught in the movement of the play, and -- to come close to an old cliche -- how the game is played is of much greater importance. Mental alertness, physical dexterity, and human camaraderie transcends the brutish

"teamwork" -- the modern manager has almost made it a dirty word -- that has the singular goal of "scoring" at any and all costs.

PAIDIA, fun, and play may sound juvenile or frivolous. However, since when did anything that is humanly fulfilling, joyful, exhilirating, and meaningful become frivolous? Is this not what life is really about, anyway? I hear people in near misery bemoaning the fact that it has been "forever since I have had any real fun!" It is the boredom and sameness of unfulfilling labor that is causing the American worker his greatest dilemmas. At the end of life, often when it is too late, many people finally come to the realization that "crossing some goal" -- this idyllic winning -- is not nearly as important as experiencing and enjoying the unfolding process of daily living -- the same daily living most often subjugated by management styles. It is not frivolous when the country music singer suggests a need to "stop and smell the roses along the way." PAIDIA encourages us to stop, to learn something of roses and ourselves in the process; AGON sternly asserts from its high-blood pressured and clenched gut podium of managerial power "to hell with roses!"

The Greeks were not the only ancient, wise culture to recognize these distinctions. The Chinese spoke of WAN and CHENG in the same way, and the American Blackfoot tribes clearly separated what they called KOANI and KACHTSI. Primitive cultures sometimes seem to have a closeness to life that allows them to notice things that somehow escape supposedly more intelligent and sophisticated cultures. This distinction between an AGON

approach and a PAIDIA approach is an excellent case in point. Our culture, ignorant of these distinctions, has rushed headlong into an agonistic worldview; it probably had it all along since the middle ages with the predominance of the political and military that occured at that time, but with the interjection of agonistic athletics as a dominant metaphor even in educational circles, AGON has been expotentially reinforced.

Writing in 1975 for SATURDAY REVIEW in an article entitled "The Great Muddling Metaphor," Thomas Middleton addressed something of the same issue as this discussion. "Some metaphors," he says, "are harmless, some are beautiful, and some are stumbling blocks to clear thinking." Even though clear thinking should be part and parcel of government and business, it must be the central element in the educational system -- both in its administration and in the basic content that is communicated to students.

AGON may have become the dominant metaphor for politics and business, and it may be on its way to being embraced by educational administrators, but when AGON gets into education, it is in an environment where it is LEAST appropriate. Education that becomes agonistic rips itself from its roots, denies its best traditions, and prostitutes itself by trying to become that which it was never intended to be.

The Greeks clearly understood the best that education could aspire to, that education that promotes culture and enhances human existence in the most positive manner possible as PAIDEIA. Immediately, the intrinsic relationship between PAIDIA and

PAIDEIA is obvious; PAIDEIA/education must be in-formed by PAIDIA! For PAIDEIA/education to be reduced to AGON is to belittle and corrupt it. To presume AGON upon PAIDEIA in the way that the contemporary athletic metaphor does as it is passed from government to business to educational administrators is to dangerously wreck havoc with that tradition most responsible for preserving that part of our culture which has been the dominant factor in maintaining our civilization's way of life.

Educational administrators are not chief executive officers or agonistic head coaches; they are educators (agents of PAIDEIA). Academic institutions are not businesses or football teams. They are not to be informed by AGON, but by PAIDIA. When they are informed by AGON, the win-at-all-costs contest or battle, education looses it independence and ceases to lead and challenge; it becomes little more than a tool serving the establishment whims of government and business. Its former status is squandered.

Education that is characterized by PAIDIA has flexibility and openness. It promotes freedom and fulfillment on both sides of the classroom podium. It feeds on idealism and creativity. It is laid back and easy going, but it is also dynamic. It creates an environment where the highest of human experiences -- learning -- can occur, and that environment cannot be forced, manipulated, over-organized, over-structured, victimized by coercion, or MANAGED. It makes room for a community of mutually respectful scholars who depend upon, challenge, and inform each other; it is not an organizational hierarchy overseen by chief

executives who sometimes act like frustrated coaches or "has been/never was" players running rampant on little leaguers in the worst senario that sometimes appears in that setting.

The management expert W. Edwards Deming has suggested, according to an article by Albert Shanker in THE NEW YORK TIMES (2/3/85), that 80 to 85% of organizational problems are with the SYSTEM of the organizational structure and its managers, and 15 to 20% are with the WORKERS within that structure. Using his criteria, it would be possible to distinguish characteristics of AGON-oriented administrators as compared to PAIDIA-oriented administrators.

AGON	PAIDIA
1. Sees workers (faculty/staff) as flesh and blood robots.	1. Sees workers as thinking, creative human beings.
2. Motivates with empty slogans.	2. Motivates by recognizing and building on successes.
3. Demands acquiescence.	3. Frees workers to speak out without fear.
4. Needs management by objectives (static).	4. Embraces mbos naturally by a continual activity of redefining objectives (dynamic).
5. Sees job as setting and enforcing standards of performance. The creation of a negative, adversary environment.	5. Sees job as providing consistency and continuity for the organization. The creation of a positive, advocate environment.

6. End is profit. Workers are always subservient to this.	6. End is to provide best and least-costly product with consumer in mind, and continuity of employment for workers.
7. Withholds information and keeps people in the dark as a central management tactic. (In his autobiography, Lee Ioccoca calls this the "mushroom theory of management" in which you keep everything in the dark and pour on the horse manure.)	7. Has no secrets.

Robert Townsend, author of UP THE ORGANIZATION, describes what is being discussed here as the PAIDIA-oriented manager/executive/administrator by calling attention to the following characteristics (SUCCESS MAGAZINE, April, 1984): "he appeals to the best in each worker, carries water for his people and protects them, knows how to make people feel important, trusts his people, gives credit to others, looks for controls to abolish, and gives honest, frequent feedback."

The AGON-oriented manager, on the other hand, who Townsend describes as a "non-leader," is arrogant, feels he can run anything but cannot, does not know the importance of his troops, does not know how to motivate honestly, covers his own ass, gives orders, is a complicator, and is intolerant of open disagreement.

Townsend may be too straight forward for some, to which he would probably respond that there is no need to walk with intimidation or "beat around the bush" on these issues. If Townsend is too strong, one might consider the work of Alon Gratch of Teachers College, Columbia University (NEW YORK TIMES, 2/10/85,F28). He draws a distinction between what he calls "Conformist" managers/adminstrators, "Conscientious" managers, and a middle group called "Post-Conformists." The first group is distinctly AGON-oriented and the second PAIDIA-oriented; the middle group has transcended the first level and is moving toward the second. The following characteristics are drawn from Gratch's work:

Conformist (AGON)	Post Conform./Conscientious (PAIDIA)
1. High orientation to rules.	1. Situational, rules serving as pragmatic guidelines. People before principles.
2. Oriented to externals (rules, orders, structure, organization, a hierarchy which places him at the top).	2. Oriented to internals. ("My conscience bothers me if I do not believe my own words.")
3. Idealism compromised to short-term goals.	3. Interested in motives, consequences, long-term goals, and ideals.
4. Self-rejecting. (Denial of self can allow for a	4. Self-critical. (Always aware of consistency between word

division between stated virtue and actual action.)	and deed, between what one is calling on others to do and what one is actually doing oneself.)
5. Others are seen as objects to manipulate toward ends, and manipulation is seen as a positive managerial asset.	5. Others are seen as a pleasure to be around; as an opportunity to broaden one's own horizons.
6. One-dimensional. Sees most situations in terms of supposedly clear-cut "blacks and whites."	6. Multi-dimensional. Flexible. Preceives subtle shades of meaning.
7. The superior and the system itself are sacrosanct.	7. Tamed rebelliousness. (A perfect synonym for PAIDIA.) Superiors and organizations needs to be challenged and criticized.
8. Excessive need for approval. Requires constant rewards; wants to be "sucked up to" by "yes men." Low level of positive ego development.	8. Mature need to generate achievement. Can strike a balance between leading and following. Moderate to high level of ego development.

Gratch readily admits that the highest levels of PAIDIA-orientation, what he terms "conscientious," "integrated," and "autonomous," may not be pragmatically possible for many

business situations.

> People in the highest stages of ego development [PAIDIA] show a deep concern for the autonomy of others demonstrated by the recognition that others need to be left free . . ., are characterized by a certain freedom from excessive striving and sense of responsibility, and accept that some problems are insoluble.

However, if there is anywhere that this personality could work in an administrative capacity, it would be education. One thing is certain: that administrative approach which moves away from AGON toward PAIDIA is most desirable. The AGON/Conformist is least appropriate in an educational environment. Such statements as "what we are selling [sic] in this school is not education but success" rush toward AGON in the worst sense of the word. True education/PAIDEIA is not something that can be treated as a marketable commodity.

In a brilliantly conceived statement which moves this discussion toward its conclusion, Middleton writes toward the end of his article: "To think in terms of contests [AGON], of 'won' and 'lost' columns, is to lose one's perspective on normal give and take -- the reasonable elastic accomodations that are really the basis of society and, ultimately, of survival itself." To me, what Middleton is describing here is the maturity and wisdom that should be the primary goal of the educational process and, when it works, should be education's contribution to the enhancement of life through other vehicles such as business and

government. But, it cannot work when education falls off into agon-y.

When education/PAIDEIA comes close to PAIDIA, it approaches moral education and infuses lives with what the Greeks termed ARETE -- character. The more that education moves away from PAIDIA, the more that it claims that it really has no responsibility for morals and values, and the less character-by-example that may be a part of its leadership.

Having been involved in athletics for all of my life, I have the greatest respect for the positive potential which resides in sports. There is nothing wrong with an athletically inclined, dominant metaphor -- if it is the right one, PAIDIA instead of AGON. In fact, if education/PAIDEIA as PAIDIA maintained a high posture and visibility beyond the corruption seeping in through some of its present administrators, there could be a reverse influence up through the strata of business and government. It should always be kept in mind that the persons who come to work in business and government will first go through the medium of education. What a chance education has to make a difference if it does not sell itself out to AGON!

If there was a positive move on education's part back to its best roots, to PAIDIA, the United States would then be moving back in the direction of another important Greek concept -- the idea that work is an integral part of a fulfilled life. When workers are in agon-y, and one expects from the reports and interviews that rise from the marketplace that they are, little real creative energy is directed at work, corners are cut

whenever possible, workmanship is compromised, and a major segment of people's lives is tolerated until quitting time with whatever distractions that can be devised. If work -- from students and teachers to educational administrators to businessmen to politicians -- were informed by PAIDIA, then our country would move back in the direction of one of its initial goals that somehow seems to have been mislaid: the pursuit of happiness. But, in the view of AGON and its promoters, perhaps that is frivolous, too?